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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY REPORT
INFORMATION FROM
FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS CD NO.

COUNTRY Yugoslavia
SUBJECT Economic - Standard of living
HOW PUBLISHED Semimonthly newspaper
WHERE PUBLISHED Bucharest
DATE PUBLISHED 1 Jun 1949
LANGUAGE Serbo-Croatian

DATE OF INFORMATION 1949

DATE DIST. 16 Nov 1949

NO. OF PAGES 2

SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

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SOURCE Pod Zastavom Internacionalizma, No 2, 1949, [anti-Tito emigre newspaper].

WORKERS PROTEST FALLING LIVING STANDARDS

The order on compensation of workers and apprentices in state and private enterprises issued in 1945 provided Yugoslav workers with an average pay of 3,200 dinars per month. At the time this was comparatively good pay, permitting a worker to satisfy his minimum subsistence and cultural requirements. Since then, however, conditions have been growing worse every year.

To conceal this, new orders have been issued reducing the purchasing power of wages, as in capitalistic countries, so that while the average wage has risen to 3,500 dinars per month, prices of some necessities have increased 10 - 15 times. For example, average costs of foodstuffs have risen from 10 dinars per kilogram for wheat flour, 40 dinars per kilogram for lard, 35 dinars per liter for oil, 30 dinars per kilogram for meat, 5 dinars per kilogram for potatoes, 7 dinars per kilogram for beans, 4 dinars per liter for milk, and 2 dinars per egg, in 1945, to 60 dinars per kilogram for wheat flour, 500 dinars per kilogram for lard, 380 dinars per liter of oil, 130 dinars per kilogram for meat, 15 dinars per kilogram for potatoes, 45 dinars per kilogram for beans, 25 dinars per liter for milk, and 20 dinars per egg, at the beginning of 1949. In other words, while workers' wages increased by 9 percent, the cost of food rose 741 percent over the 1945 level.

Although a system of "guaranteed supply" is in effect in Yugoslavia, workers cannot live on rationed food because the quantities are very small and deliveries are very late or omitted altogether. Meat is distributed once every 2 - 3 months, and often no distribution is made at all. Fat cannot be obtained, except perhaps once in 2 - 3 months. Lumbermen and others engaged in heavy work do not receive the dried bacon to which they are entitled, and miners, founders, and others employed in unhealthy occupations do not receive the milk allotted to them by regulations. Milk for children also is received irregularly, if at all, and then is diluted with water. Manufactured goods can be purchased only on the black market: a box of matches for 20 dinars, soap at 400 - 500 dinars per kilogram, a box of shoe polish for 50 - 70 dinars, a dozen sewing machine needles for 600 - 800 dinars, etc.

In the fall of 1948, the workers at the Store rolling mill and foundry near Celje decided to go on strike, because of the poor food and because they had not received meat or fats for 3 months. To quiet them, they were promised two car-loads of meat. However, the meat was sent to Austria to luxuries and never

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reached the workers. The workers went on strike in protest, as a result of which some were arrested and dozens discharged.

In Maribor, likewise, the workers of the Railroad Car Factory went on strike. When strikebreakers could not persuade the workers to return to work, the UDB arrested dozens, and over 100 were discharged. They were written up in the personnel files as enemies of the people and blackballed from subsequent employment with any enterprises. Their places were taken by former Cetnik and Ustasi jailbirds who had been convicted in the People's courts.

About 500 workers at the Trbovlje mine went on strike because food allotted to them was shipped to Italy. Workers were arrested by the UDB or discharged in consequences.

In the fall of 1948, about 2,000 workers at the state farm in Vukovar struck because they were cheated on their wages and because of poor food and housing. The UDB kept them locked up for 3 days without food, to force them to return to work. The workers on the "Belje" State Farm worked all summer and fall without vacation, with poor food and housing, and over a thousand of them protested. When the UDB tried to arrest those thought to have organized the protest, the workers resisted, whereupon the UDB replied with shots. Three workers were badly wounded and nine arrested.

Alarmed at the mass walkouts, Tito and Kidric promised an improvement in the supply situation. During January and February, the government met four times to find some new rationing system but failed to do so.

Speaking before the Third Congress of the People's Front, Tito admitted that "There are certain defects in the supply situation, resulting from faulty distribution and careless waste," but assured his hearers that "there is a little more than enough fat this winter /1948-49/ to meet our requirements for the first and second quarters /of 1949/." He was thinking of the pigs that his agents had seized from the people in 1948 and carried off to state farms, where they were housed in unsuitable quarters, and 62 percent of them died. At the collective farm at Stara Moravica, 1,200 pigs out of a total of 2,000 died, and at "Jaksicevo" Provincial farm 2,000 out of 4,000 pigs were buried in manure piles or cremated in the furnace of the power plant.

While the workers go for months without receiving rations "guaranteed" to them, UDBA officials, cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, mayors, and strikebreakers receive unlimited quantities of fats, meat, salami, pressed ham, butter, oranges, and other delicacies. While the workers go in rags and barefoot, the new bourgeoisie wears the finest British materials and the latest footwear.

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